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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAN AND INR/B

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: BIO DATA REPORT: LESLIE, MEGAN -- MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR
THE FEDERAL RIDING OF HALIFAX

¶1. (U) Introduction/Summary: Rookie MP Megan Leslie won the Halifax seat as the New Democratic Party candidate in the October 2008 federal general election. Leslie replaced veteran NDP MP and former national party leader Alexa McDonough who retired from politics prior to the election. Initially there were some doubts if Leslie could hold the seat for the party, which up until McDonough's first victory, had always voted either Conservative or Liberal. However, thanks to a well-organized campaign and her strong appeal to the voters, Leslie walked away with a wide margin of victory, taking 42 percent of the vote compared to her closest rival with 27 percent. Like most new MPs, Leslie is adapting to her new role with gusto, but it appears unlikely that this lawyer and tireless worker for the underprivileged will be giving up the mantle of social activist any time soon. END INTRODUCTION/SUMMARY

¶2. (U) NAME: Megan LESLIE

¶3. (U) DATE/PLACE OF BIRTH: 29 Sept 73; Toronto, Ontario

¶4. (U) CURRENT POSITION: Member of Parliament (New Democratic Party) for the Federal Riding of Halifax (Nova Scotia)

¶5. (U) PARLIAMENTARY FUNCTIONS:
NDP Party Critic for:

--Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

--Homelessness

--Housing

--Literacy

--Post Secondary Education

--Aboriginal Affairs and Justice (Assistant Critic)

¶6. (U) POLITICAL/PROFESSIONAL CAREER:

--No previous political experience

--Prior to her entry into elected politics, she worked at Dalhousie University Legal Aid Services in Halifax as a Community Legal Worker and law school teacher.

¶7. (U) COMMUNITY/VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT:

Member of the following groups:

--Affordable Energy Coalition

--Community Coalition to End Poverty

--Social Activist Law Student Association

--Community Advocates Network

--Member and past cultural chair of the Scandinavian Society of Nova Scotia and an active member of the Finlandia Club of Nova Scotia (FYI: Ms. Leslie's family background is Finnish. End FYI)

18. (U) LECTURES/PUBLICATIONS:

--Presenter to the 2005 UN Conference on Climate Change, "Heat or Eat: Energy Efficiency and Rate Affordability for Low Income Households"

--Presenter to the 2008 Canadian Public Health Association national conference: "A Community Poverty Reduction Strategy"

--Published an article in the 2004 Dalhousie Journal of Legal Studies: "Boys Will Be Boys Will Be Girls: Sex Reassignment Surgery and the Ethics Of State Funding"

19. (U) EDUCATION:

--Bachelor of Laws Degree (LLB), Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

--Undergraduate studies at York University, Toronto, Ont.

110. (U) WEB PAGE: <http://meganleslie.ndp.ca>

111. (SBU) COMMENT: CG and staff met with MP Leslie in early April, some six months after her election to the House of Commons. As with most rookie MPs she was still adjusting to her new life in Ottawa and in her case, as an elected politician. Politics, however, is not Leslie's main focus in life. Rather, her focus is on helping, and now representing, those in need.

HALIFAX 00000016 002 OF 002

Despite her young age, she already has a long history of involvement in a variety of causes such as assisting the impoverished and those needing affordable housing, as well as championing the rights of minorities. She is also a deeply committed environmentalist with a particular interest in climate change. Since her election, she has carried on with this activism, and continues to speak out on these issues in numerous small, low-key venues. She has also branched out to comment on more global issues such as nuclear disarmament and Middle East politics.

112. (U) Her current critic duties with the federal NDP caucus reflect her activist leanings as her subject areas are all current social issues. Even the choice of her constituency office space in Halifax is indicative of her activist roots. Unlike her noted predecessor, Alexa McDonough, Leslie has chosen to set up shop in a converted retail space in a part of her riding noted for its poverty and long history of social problems. It comes as no surprise either that her new office is just a few yards away from her former employer, Dalhousie Legal Aid.

113. (SBU) In terms of her personal characteristics, MP Leslie is very approachable and, as a recent magazine interviewer noted, she has a laid back style that conveys the feeling that you are "chatting with a neighbor on her front porch." Interestingly, in this same press interview, Leslie acknowledged that despite her legal training, she has no intention of practicing law. Instead, she sees the law as a tool for social change and for bringing about justice and equality. Likewise, she sees her MP status in that same light - not as a tool for personal gain and power, but rather as she says, "for making Canada a better place for people who are marginalized." For now, the new MP remains a relative unknown outside Canadian social activist circles. Just how far she will venture from that comfort zone is unknown at this point, or what it might mean for her re-election chances if she decides not to expand her borders. For now, however, she appears fully engaged in the fight for the needs of her constituents and not on the fight with future political foes come the next election call. END COMMENT.
FOSTER